



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

**Written Testimony of Attorney Alexis N. Highsmith, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.
In Support of H. B. No. 5207, An Act Concerning Criminal Background Checks for
Prospective State Employees.**

February 25, 2010

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid, a legal services program providing free legal services to low-income residents in and around Hartford County. Connecticut's Legal Services Programs support H.B. 5207, which would prohibit inquiries regarding a prospective state employee's past convictions until a conditional offer of employment has been made to the prospective employee.

Legal Services represents formerly incarcerated persons in a variety of civil matters, from benefits to housing to employment. One of my core responsibilities is to represent ex-offenders attempting to navigate the difficult process of applying for a pardon of their criminal record. These are people who have stayed out of trouble and made positive contributions to their families and communities for many years. Many individuals do not qualify for a pardon, primarily because of the recent date of their conviction. While these individuals work towards rehabilitation, they often need other resources to assist with their employment search.

Throughout the country, municipalities and counties have implemented various forms of legislation known as "ban the box," removing unnecessary hurdles to employment facing ex-offenders seeking work. Connecticut has also become part of this movement, as Norwich, New Haven, Hartford, and Bridgeport have all passed individual versions of this legislation. H.B. 5207 further advances this goal on a statewide level. Hawaii and Minnesota have enacted this legislation statewide. Connecticut has the opportunity to join this elite group and secure employment rights for all of its citizens.

By eliminating the question asking whether an applicant has been convicted of a crime, a prospective employer can be initially evaluated on their merits alone, and questions regarding previous criminal history can be left to a later phase of the hiring process.

Society, as a whole, reaps tremendous benefits when ex-offenders re-enter mainstream society successfully. Employment serves as a key component to this success. Without employment, formerly incarcerated persons and persons with criminal records are unable to provide for themselves and their families.